



Board Structure and Responsibilities (Estrutura e responsabilidades do Conselho de Escola – C.G./C.P.)

“Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to excellence, intelligent planning, and focused effort.”

Paul J. Meyer

Before a school opens, the steering committee should determine how the initial board will be selected, how subsequent members will be added (by appointment or election), the length of term, required training, expectations for conduct, conflict of interest guidelines, individual roles and responsibilities, emergency protocols, procedures for meetings, workshops, and committees, and board evaluation. Founding board members should also establish policies for handling conflict and working with board members who are no longer productive or are struggling to keep their commitment. Board member agreements contain these types of expectations and are signed by all seated board members on an annual basis. In addition, many of these decisions should be written into the bylaws of the school and/or board policy manual. The bylaws should also include any board requirements required by the school’s authorizer.

Board Composition

Appointed or elected board members: The founders should determine whether board members are appointed or whether they are elected and if so, by whom.

Size of the board: A board should be large enough to provide good oversight for school committees. Often boards place at least one board member on each committee. A very large board, however, can be unproductive. Most charter school boards have between seven and 11 members. An odd number of directors reduces the likelihood of tied votes.

Candidates for the board: Diversity is the hallmark of an effective board. Boards benefit from having members with varied expertise in education, human resources, personnel management, finance, law, marketing, strategic planning, or fundraising, as well as individuals with connections to the community, local businesses, and political leaders. Depending on the stage of development, the school may benefit from having board members with specific skills. Expertise in real estate, code compliance, or contracting, for example, is valuable during facility expansion. Diversity of perspective is also important. Boards composed of only “insiders” tend to miss early signs of problems in the operation of the board and the school.

Another consideration is whether staff and administrators may serve as board members. Many charter schools and charter school authorizers consider it a best practice to bar employees and their immediate family members from serving on the governing board. If the board chooses to place an employee on the board, it needs to establish rules for voting when there is a conflict of interest. Many schools that have employee board members avoid conflicts of interest by designating employees as non-voting members.

Characteristics of an Effective Charter School Governing Board

- Passionate, unwavering belief in the charter school’s mission and core values
- A firm understanding of the charter promises and a clear, consistent way to measure them
- Clarity of collective vision—where the school is and where it wants to be in the future
- Focus on results
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities of the full board, individual trustees and committees
- The right structure in terms of board size, composition, committees and officers
- Board meetings focused on strategic issues, not just reporting
- Clear understanding of the difference between governance and management



- A school leader who has the time to assist in the creation of effective governance
- A strong partnership between the board and the school leader which is built on mutual trust and respect

Source: Authorizer Issue Brief, National Association of Charter School Authorizers, September 2005

Board Offices

President: The president establishes the meeting's agenda and ensures members have all the information they need in their packets. The president is usually the chief liaison to the administrator, acts as the primary signing agent for official board documents, and is responsible for ensuring the board is in compliance with the charter contract, board manual, and bylaws.

Chairperson: Some boards have a chairperson in addition to a board president. The chairperson leads the meetings and ensures the board follows appropriate parliamentary procedures.

Vice-President: The vice-president serves when the president is absent.

Secretary: The secretary records minutes for the meetings and keeps copies of agendas and minutes, correspondence between the board and other parties, committee reports, articles of incorporation, charter contracts, and the bylaws.

Treasurer: The treasurer keeps financial records and inventory lists, tracks and records deposits to school accounts, provides assistance during financial audits, and interacts with the business manager for the school. When a school does not have a business manager, the treasurer generally assists with approval of payments.

New Board Member Recruitment

The founders should establish a policy for replacing retiring board members. Many boards form a committee to assist in member development. The process begins by developing a profile of the present board and determining the types of expertise needed at the stage of school development. The committee then recruits individuals who can commit sufficient time to serve and who are internally motivated, reliable, and dedicated to the school and its mission and vision.

Recruits should be given enough information about the expectations of the board to determine whether they should make the commitment. If he or she consents, the new member should be selected (by vote) or appointed to the board according to the bylaws.

Once on the board, new members receive a current copy of the board manual. Board manuals contain the vision and mission statements; the school's strategic plan; a list of the year's scheduled board meetings; agenda items routinely addressed, listed under each month; a roster of all board members and their contact information; the current year's operating budget; tabs for monthly board packets (agenda, previous meeting's minutes, financial statements, reports, background information or other materials); and other important documents (e.g. Educational Improvement Plan, state testing data, staff list). New board members should also receive training in strategic planning, finance management, and program evaluation as needed.

Term Limits

To maintain a level of continuity, institutional memory, and expertise, it is important to stagger the terms of the first board. For example, a founding board could have two members with a four-year term limit, two members with a three-year term limit, and three members with a two year term limit. As the original board members retire, replacement board members serve three-year terms.

Governance Structure/Model



According to the most recent survey of Colorado charter schools, one-quarter of schools had a “shared” governing board comprised of parents, school staff, and community members; a third had a board comprised of parents and community members; 16% had a board comprised of parents only; and the remainder had other combinations of parents, community members, and school personnel.

The most common model for school governance in Colorado charter schools is the shared board model. In these schools, parent representation on the board is substantial. Frequently, administrators serve on the board as ex officio (non-voting) members. This model gives parents, teachers, and administrators a sense of ownership in the school. Some schools have boards that are largely composed of professionals who are not parents of students in the school. These schools generally serve at-risk youth who may be disconnected from their families.

Board Committees

Committees comprise between five and eight members headed by a chairperson with relevant expertise. Committees assist the board by conducting research on critical issues enabling the whole board to focus on the big picture (i.e. strategic planning, policy development, and financial management). Committees increase member buy-in and ensure work is fairly distributed.

The board should set clear expectations and policies for committee operation, this includes whether committees are empowered to make decisions or just provide information to the whole board, when committees should report findings/decisions, and how long the committees stand. There are two types of committees – standing and ad hoc. Standing committees are part of the permanent structure of the school. Their function is described in board policy and generally related to the governance of the school. Committees on finance, board development, and accountability are of this type. Ad hoc committees focus on specific, timely issues and are dissolved upon their resolution.

Board Assessment

Effective boards regularly evaluate their effectiveness. Evaluations should include self-assessment and assessment from parents, staff, administration, and even students regarding the board’s communication, support, finance management, policy development, dedication to the mission and vision, and relationship building. Some boards may wish to include individual board member self-evaluations regarding their contribution and expectations. The board should also evaluate the effectiveness of its standing and ad hoc committees.

Fonte:

DeHoff, Randy (s/d). *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook*. Colorado Charter School Institute.